

The “Mad Hatter’s” adventures in education: Joseph King (1860-1943) and the impact of personality

Joseph King (1860-1943), known as the “Mad Hatter” because of his appearance and eccentric manner, was a man who cared very much about education in a wide range of arenas. He was a founder of Mansfield House University Settlement in London and of the Peasant Arts Society, both philanthropic organisations which aimed to improve the lot of the poor, in part through increased educational opportunities. He was a member of his local Education Committee during the stormy period around the introduction of the 1902 Education Act and a Member of the UK Parliament between 1910 and 1918, in which role he made many contributions to political debates about educational matters. He was not an original or a great thinker but he was an enthusiast who allowed ideas to take hold. This article examines his work in all these spheres, building a picture of how one man sought to influence the world around him. Using psychologist David G. Winter’s broad-based definition of “personality”, it asks how the unique characteristics of Joseph King impacted on what he could achieve. It concludes that his connections and his money, the privileges of his class and gender, were significant factors in his successes. However, his distinctive traits were also important, for better and for worse. His forceful manner and pomposity were limiting factors, but his impressive energy and powers of persistence enabled him to make a contribution in his own time and to leave a legacy which can be felt today.

Key Words: Biography; Personality; Political Influence; University Settlements; Arts and Crafts.

Joseph King (1860-1943) was known as the “Mad Hatter” because he looked somewhat like Tenniel’s illustrations of that character in *Alice in Wonderland*¹ although his eccentric behaviour and mannerisms were also contributory factors.² He was a man who cared very much about education and who attempted to improve access to it and influence its form in an extraordinary range of arenas. He was a founder of Mansfield House University Settlement, an organisation devoted to alleviating poverty and disadvantage in London’s East End, in part through providing educational opportunities. He was also a founder of the Peasant Arts Society, which aimed to teach weaving and other handicrafts to English rural populations for their moral and cultural benefit. He was an active member of the Education Committee in his

¹“‘Mad Hatter’ MP Dead,” *Evening Despatch*, August 26, 1943, 1.

²“Ilford By-Election: Women Voters Organized,” *The Times*, August 26, 1920, 7.

local area during the stormy period around the introduction and implementation of the 1902 Education Act. He was a member of the British parliament between 1910 and 1918 and made many contributions to political debates about educational matters. Taken together, his work in all these often interconnected spheres is representative of a significant swathe of educational and social thinking in England during the time in which he was active.

This article considers King as an individual trying to change his world and the extent of his ability to do so. He was not the originator of the ideas behind university settlements or arts and crafts movement but he was a very early adopter and a great enthusiast and promoter: a significant cog in the machinery which allowed the ideas to take shape and take hold.

Mansfield House still exists as part of an amalgamated community centre and service provider called Aston-Mansfield³ and the Peasant Arts Group is still represented by a collection of artefacts in the Haslemere Educational Museum in the county of Surrey.⁴

Academic interest continues in both these organisations.⁵ He also had a tangible impact on educational policy. He credited himself with being the driving force behind the final abolishing of fees in elementary schools⁶ and had a decisive influence on the shaping of nursery policy in the 1918 Education Act.⁷ This is a modest but nonetheless tangible legacy and it justifies asking why King was successful but also what factors limited his success.

This article therefore contributes to the debate about the relationship between the individual and society and thus biography and history. In 2010, Barbara Caine identified

³ “About Us,” Aston Mansfield, accessed September 22, 2016, <https://www.aston-mansfield.org.uk/Pages/Category/about-us>

⁴ “The European Peasant Art Collection,” Haslemere Educational Museum, accessed September 22, 2016, http://www.haslemeremuseum.co.uk/humanhistory_files/peasant-arts/Peasant-Art-Collection.html

⁵ Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late Victorian London* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007); Katherine Bradley, *Poverty, Philanthropy and the State: Charities and the working class in London, 1918-1979* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Alla Myzelev, “Craft Revival in Haslemere: She, who Weaves...,” *Women’s History Review* 18, no. 1 (2009): 597-618.

⁶ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, March 18, 1918, vol 104 cc674-779

⁷ Amy Palmer, “Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes? Choosing and Failing to Choose between Policy Alternatives in Nursery Education in England, 1918–1972,” *History of Education* 45, no. 1 (2016): 103-121.

biography as a “current interest” among historians.⁸ Jane Martin has demonstrated that this interest is also growing in the specific field of history of education.⁹ The study of great men (and occasionally women) has of course been a feature of history since classical times¹⁰ and this has manifested in history of education in the production of biographies of philosophers and pioneers. Research emphasising the importance of societal forces has been understood as a challenge to these deeply traditional approaches.¹¹ The more recent biographical turn seeks a more profound exploration of the relationship between these forces and individual agency. One way of exploring this topic is to consider the lives of those who are perceived to have been disadvantaged by society, such as women within a patriarchy. Such studies, according to Martin, have tended to present a case that “women were not merely the victims of history but the makers of it.”¹² Conversely, Brehony has used an account of nursery school campaigner Lady Astor to set out his position that patriarchal forces were indeed a blight on the political careers of even the most socially advantaged women.¹³

Joseph King’s story acts as an obverse of this approach. This article makes no claim for him as a “great man” of history but rather uses him to consider what an individual who was socially privileged and yet not exceptionally talented could or could not achieve in this period. King was male, from the dominant ethnic group, the son of a doctor, educated at the prestigious Uppingham School and at Trinity College, Oxford University and married to the daughter of the respected artist, H.G.Hine.¹⁴ The one possible piece of grit in the oyster was his Non-conformist religion. Politician and biographer Roy Hattersley has written how David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister from 1916 to 1922, felt like a “Great Outsider”

⁸ Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 1.

⁹ Jane Martin, “Interpreting Biography in the *History of Education*: Past and Present,” *History of Education* 41, no. 1 (2012): 96.

¹⁰ Michael Rustin, *Reason and Unreason: Psychoanalysis, Science and Politics* (London: Continuum, 2001).

¹¹ Martin, “Interpreting Biography in the *History of Education*,” 96.

¹² Jane Martin, “Reflections on Writing a Biographical Account of a Woman Educator Activist,” *History of Education* 30, no. 2 (2001): 163-176.

¹³ Kevin Brehony, “Lady Astor’s Campaign for Nursery Schools in Britain 1930-1939,” *History of Education Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2009): 196-210.

¹⁴ *Who Was Who, Volume IV 1941-1950*, 5th ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1980).

to the establishment, in part because of his being brought up in a Non-conformist sect, the Campbellites.¹⁵ King certainly spoke up about Non-conformist grievances and an awareness of being part of a socially disadvantaged group may have been a motivator for his political involvement, a phenomenon that has been theorised by psychologist Lauren E. Duncan.¹⁶ Nonetheless, as a Congregationalist, he was a member of a much more mainstream, middle-class and respectable denomination than Lloyd George¹⁷ and in fact his religion gave him access to influential institutions and individuals, as described below in connection with Mansfield House. This was not someone battling against systematic barriers. This means that there is more possibility that his own personal characteristics were a key element in his success and failures and this article argues that this was indeed the case.

Analysing the personality of a historical figure might seem at first glance to be a foolhardy endeavour. Paula R. Backscheider has argued that our understanding of personality is built on “unconscious cultural assumptions”.¹⁸ We may search for “unity and coherence” where none exists.¹⁹ The post-modern perspective is that a subject “performs or creates a sense of self”²⁰ which may vary from context to context. However, the eminent biographer Richard Holmes has asserted his belief in the “integrity of human character” as demonstrated by repeated behaviour over the course of a subject’s life²¹ and there is support for this position from the field of psychology. Jeffrey J. Mondiak, who conducts empirical research into the impact of personality on political behaviour, claims that this exhibits “tremendous stability over time”.²²

¹⁵ Roy Hattersley, *David Lloyd George: The Great Outsider* (London: Abacus, 2012).

¹⁶ Lauren E. Duncan, “Using Group Consciousness Theories to Understand Political Activism: Case Studies of Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton and Ingo Hasselbach,” *Journal of Personality* 78: 6 (2010): 1601-1636.

¹⁷ David J. Jeremy, “Late-Victorian and Edwardian Methodist Businessmen and Wealth,” in *Religion, Business and Wealth in Modern Britain*, ed. David J. Jeremy (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁸ Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁰ Barbara Caine, *Biography and History*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²¹ Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London: HarperPress, 2011), 174.

²² Jeffrey J. Mondiak, *Personality and the Foundations of Political Behaviour* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5.

There have been some previous attempts to analyse the impact of personality in historical contexts. Historian Margaret MacMillan, for example, has recently examined prominent figures from world history in order to identify how characteristics such as “love, fear, hatred, jealousy, ambition, altruism, loyalty and integrity” shaped events.²³ She builds a strong case that these aspects should be factored into historical accounts. A scholar who has offered a more sustained and systematic analysis of particular individuals is psychologist David G. Winter, who argues that the personality of historical figures can be studied through quantitative analysis of historical texts and has himself produced such a study of James I of England (1566-1625).²⁴ Winter suggests a broad-based definition of “personality” which encompasses four elements: “motivation”, “cognition”, “traits or temperaments” and “social context”.²⁵ The “social context” includes the immediate situation, enduring circumstances and also the “macrocontexts” of, for example, class and religion.²⁶ “Motivation” includes a person’s subconscious as well as conscious reasons for action and is subject to change over time. “Cognitions”, which are values and beliefs, tend to be more stable.²⁷ Winter’s understanding of “traits” rests on the established “big five” model of “extraversion”, “agreeableness”, “conscientiousness”, “emotional stability” and “openness to experiences.”²⁸ Together these factors define us as individuals.

This article takes Winter’s definition of personality as a starting point and attempts to identify what made Joseph King the unique individual he was. It does not however use his detailed textual analysis, drawing instead in a more interpretative way on a wide base of evidence. King left no diary or private papers but data does exist in published sources,

²³ Margaret MacMillan, *History’s People: Personalities and the Past* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2016), xii.

²⁴ David G. Winter, “Things I’ve Learned about Personality from Studying Leaders at a Sistance,” *Journal of Personality* 73, no. 3 (2005): 557-584.

²⁵ David G. Winter, *Analysis and Interpretation of Lives* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), xi.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ David G. Winter, “Philosopher-King or Polarizing Politician? A Personality Profile of Barack Obama,” *Political Psychology* 32, no. 6 (2011): 1063.

including his own writings and those of his associates; in archival holdings relating to Mansfield House, the Peasant Arts Society and Surrey County Council; in local and national newspapers and in Hansard, the record of parliamentary proceedings in the United Kingdom. The approach taken rests on the belief that definitive and absolute knowledge is not a realistic aim and the historian should aim for a provisional interpretation of available sources. As political historian Ben Pimlott memorably put it “nobody has access to another’s soul and the character on the page is the author’s unique creation”.²⁹

This article offers an interpretation of King and how he functioned within four arenas of his educational work, as specified above: the university settlement movement, the Peasant Arts movement, Surrey County Council and his work as an MP. A description of these sometimes interconnected arenas and his role within them will portray the social context in which he operated. Evidence will then be sought as to what his behaviour in these various contexts say about his motives, cognitions and traits. There are gaps in the portrait which cannot be filled: for example, it has not proved possible to analyse all five personality traits in each arena. There are also contradictions which cannot be resolved and at times the best explanation is that King did indeed perform his personality differently in different situations, as the post-modernists suggest. In each area of his work, the article considers whether the unique individual Joseph King made a difference and what helped or hindered his aims.

Mansfield House University Settlement: The Non-Conformist Philanthropist

The University settlement movement, which began in the 1880s, involved wealthy persons, often young Oxbridge educated men, living in institutions which rather resembled Oxbridge colleges but which were situated in very poor neighbourhoods for the purpose of mitigating the impacts of poverty. Frederick Rockell, writing in 1912 in *Millgate Monthly*, the

²⁹ Ben Pimlott, “Brushstrokes” in *Lives for Sale: Biographers’ Tales*, ed. Mark Bostridge (London: Continuum, 2004), 169.

magazine of the co-operative society, described them as knights “banded together to wage war against oppression, against injustice”.³⁰ Despite settlers claiming that they were in these areas to learn from those around them as well as provide succour,³¹ some scholars have, perhaps inevitably, seen these efforts as patronising: Marxist historian Brian Simon described the movement as “neo-feudal”.³² The early settlements were focused on social issues but saw providing educational activities as a key part of alleviating the problems around them.³³ These included classes in a wide range of subjects, university style lectures and art exhibitions.³⁴ This was a battle fought on the cultural front against “the vulgarization of society” that they associated with industrialisation.³⁵ Settlers were also involved in educational politics by taking places on the local School Boards.³⁶

King was a founding member of Mansfield House University Settlement in Canning Town, East London, which was established in 1890.³⁷ This was attached to the Non-conformist Mansfield College in Oxford University and was a distinctively Non-conformist settlement but one which concerned itself with the whole community and made “no attempt to proselytise”.³⁸ King was aged thirty at this time and was not a Mansfield student. He was, however, an admirer of the work of the minister in Canning Town, F.W.Newland. When Newland eventually left the area, King spoke of him very warmly: “he had known Mr

³⁰ Frederick Rockell, “Knights of the Long Table: An Account of the Social Work of Mansfield House University Settlement, Canning Town, London E.,” *The Millgate Monthly: A Popular Magazine Devoted to Association, Education, Literature and General Advancement*, Vii, part 1, 1912, no. 77 (1912): 301.

³¹ Werner Picht, *Toynbee Hall and the English Settlement Movement*, trans. Lilian A. Cowell (London: G.Bell and Sons Lt, 1914).

³² Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), 78.

³³ Mark Freeman, “‘No Finer School than a Settlement’: The Development of the Educational Settlement Movement,” *History of Education* 31, no. 3 (2002): 245-262.

³⁴ Scotland, *Squires in the Slums*.

³⁵ Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 1984).

³⁶ Percy Alden, “The University Settlement in Relation to Local Administration,” in *The Universities and the Social Problem: An Account of the University Settlements in East London*, ed. John Knapp (London: Rivington, Percival and Co, 1895).

³⁷ Scotland, *Squires in the Slums*.

³⁸ Michael Rose, “The Secular Faith of the Social Settlements: ‘If Christ came to Chicago’,” in *Settlements, Social Change and Community Action: Good neighbours*, ed. Ruth Gilchrist and Tony Jeffs (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001), 22.

Newland ever since his first term when he came up to Oxford and he thought he loved and respected him the more every time he had seen him since”.³⁹ He was also “a lifelong friend” of Dr Fairbairn, Mansfield College Principal, under whom he studied at Airedale College in Bradford while contemplating joining the ministry.⁴⁰ King was not actually a settler himself: The 1892 publication *Life at Mansfield House* lists his address as in Hampstead.⁴¹ His initial role was to act as treasurer and member of the finance committee, in which capacity he was ex officio a member of the executive committee.⁴² Minute books indicate that he was a regular attender of meetings and took the chair on occasions. He was also a member of a sub-committee tasked with finding premises for residences.⁴³ He resigned his post as treasurer in 1899 without giving a reason in the formal meeting, at which point he was elected as an individual to the executive committee.⁴⁴ He was continually re-elected to this committee via nomination from Mansfield College until 1920.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, the extant records do not reveal a great deal more about his personal involvement in the settlement. Apart from the praise of Newland above, the only time that his voice can really be heard as an individual is in a Finance Report written jointly by him and Will Reason, the financial secretary, which shows a certain pride in their careful management: “With less income we have yet done more. This has been due mainly to

³⁹ Minutes of the Executive Committee June 1890-September 23 1896, Executive Committee Meeting, November 20, 1894, Mansfield House University Settlement, C/AM/3/1/10/1 [30/4], Newham Archive and Local Studies Library, London.

⁴⁰ “Social and personal” *Western Daily Press*, January 28, 1910, 6.

⁴¹ Mansfield House Residents, *Life at Mansfield House* (London: Mansfield House, 1892).

⁴² Minutes of the Executive Committee June 1890-September 23 1896, C/AM/3/1/10/1 [30/4], Mansfield House University Settlement, Newham Archive and Local Studies Library, London.

⁴³ Minutes of the Executive Committee June 1890-September 23 1896, Executive Committee meeting, January 18, 1894, Mansfield House University Settlement, C/AM/3/1/10/1 [30/4], Newham Archive and Local Studies Library, London.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Executive Committee June 1890-September 23 1896, Executive Committee meeting, June 28, 1894, Mansfield House University Settlement, C/AM/3/1/10/1 [30/4], Newham Archive and Local Studies Library, London.

⁴⁵ Minutes of Annual General Meetings, September 23, 1896-December 10, 1924, Mansfield House University Settlement, C/AM/3/1/6/1 [28/6], Newham Archive and Local Studies Library, London.

greater economy in local expenditure”.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, it is possible to discern something from this aspect of his life about his cognitions (values and beliefs) and motives for involvement in social and educational work and perhaps also about his personal traits. The first of these is the importance of his religion as a driver for social action. The second is the fact that “affiliation” or the desire to make and maintain connections with others⁴⁷ also provides motivation for his actions, as is demonstrated by the importance of his admiration of Newland and friendship with Fairbairn in drawing him into this project. In terms of traits, his founding such an enterprise, still new and innovative at the time, suggests a high “openness to experience” and the regular attendance at meetings and the pride taken in the financial prudence which allows more to be achieved implies a high “conscientiousness”, as does his sustained commitment over a number of decades. All of these themes are relevant to other spheres in which he became involved.

As Nigel Scotland has argued, the university settlements had a significant impact on their localities and together impacted on public policy, influencing thinking about, for example, the need for pensions and for legal aid (an innovation of Mansfield House itself).⁴⁸ Joseph King played his part in this collective action. His social position and his connections with the Non-conformist community in Oxford were what enabled him to do so and his religious convictions gave him the motivation. The organisation benefitted from his expertise, his dedication and commitment and his investment in the personal relationships necessary for smooth functioning.

The Peasant Arts Movement: a Spokesman for the Pre-industrial World

⁴⁶ Mansfield House University Settlement in East London, 4th Annual Report, September 30, 1894, Mansfield House University Settlement, C/AM/3/2/1/3, Newham Archive and Local Studies Library, London.

⁴⁷ Winter, *Analysis and Interpretation of Lives*.

⁴⁸ Scotland, *Squires in the Slums*.

King, his wife Maude, her sister and her brother-in law, Ethel and Godfrey Blount, were the founders of the Peasant Art(s) Movement centred on the town of Haslemere in Surrey.⁴⁹ The term “movement” has been used to signify the grouping which began as the Peasant Arts Society in 1897 and which later adapted into forms called the Peasant Arts Fellowship and the Peasant Arts Guild.⁵⁰ It was very much part of the wider Arts and Crafts movement which was inspired by art critic John Ruskin’s idea that individual human beings have a fundamental need to make beautiful objects, a position conceived in opposition to the mass-production of Victorian industry.⁵¹ The Kings’ initial contribution was the establishment of a cottage weaving industry using the labour of local women.⁵² However, the movement was first and foremost educational in its intent: the underlying purpose, as set out in one of the fellowship papers published in 1911, was to restore “Country Life” through “the re-education of the Peasant – man, woman and child”.⁵³ Not only did people in the countryside need to be taught specific skills, their cultural life was in general unacceptable: even “good and kind” women, for example, “smoke, read bad novels and play bridge”.⁵⁴ More wholesome activities would save them from “anguish and despair”.⁵⁵ Education was provided through a number of outlets: Maude and Ethel set up a Wheel and Spindle Club for children, which ran after school and on Saturdays;⁵⁶ a teacher was employed to travel round the country to initiate and support weaving groups with a few weeks or months instruction;⁵⁷ a journal, initially *The Vineyard* and later *The Country Heart*, was established which provided general information

⁴⁹ Emma Shepley, “The Haslemere Context” in *The Lost Arts of Europe: The Haslemere Collection of European Arts*, ed. David Crossley and Lou Taylor (Haslemere: Haslemere Educational Museum, 2000).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Stuart Macdonald, *A Century of Arts and Design Education: From Arts and Crafts to Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, Lutterworth Press, 2005).

⁵² Myzelev, “Craft Revival in Haslemere.”

⁵³ The Peasant Arts Fellowship, *Peasant Arts Fellowship Papers No 1* (London: The Vineyard Press, 1911), 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁶ Ethel Blount and Maude E. King, *Our Experience of the Influences of Handicraft Upon the Workers*, *Peasant Arts Fellowship Papers No 10* (London: The Vineyard Press, 1913).

⁵⁷ Kate Sperling, *My First Year’s Work for the Peasant Arts Fellowship*, *Peasant Arts Fellowship Papers No 13* (London: The Vineyard Press, 1913).

about the movement whilst publishing works of art and literature and a Peasant Arts collection was established which later became part of the Haslemere Educational Museum.⁵⁸

Joseph King's role in the movement was perhaps rather secondary to Maude's. His cousin Greville MacDonald, who was also active in the organisations, claimed that Maude was the one who decided that "passive sympathy" with Ruskin's aims was no longer enough and that her husband, "keenly appreciating genius", let her have her way.⁵⁹ His role was partly to ensure that the enterprise was "cushioned by wealth", providing emergency funds to keep things ticking over.⁶⁰ He took a particular interest in the museum, becoming curator in 1910⁶¹ and maintaining this role until 1939 when he retired due to ill-health.⁶² During the time of his curatorship, he corresponded with experts in the field such as William Morris' daughter May,⁶³ wrote a guidebook for the museum⁶⁴ and gave lectures for adults⁶⁵ and also for children.⁶⁶ The fact that he carried on these activities after the late 1920s, when the movement was wound up following the death of key members, including Maude,⁶⁷ speaks to a genuine enthusiasm that he sustained into old age.

King's involvement in this movement provides some clues as to his cognitions. The idea of a privileged elite teaching their local working classes how they should live had very close parallels with the university settlement movement and thus there is a degree of consistency here, but of course there can be no assumption that he whole-heartedly agreed

⁵⁸ Diana Hawkes, preface to *The Lost Arts of Europe: The Haslemere Collection of European Arts* ed. David Crossley and Lou Taylor (Haslemere: Haslemere Educational Museum, 2000), 2.

⁵⁹ Greville MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932), 375.

⁶⁰ Shepley, "The Haslemere Context," 5.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Letter, Joseph King to E.W.Swanton, May 6, 1939, LD.5.102, Haslemere Educational Museum (Library and Archive), Haslemere, Surrey.

⁶³ Letter, Joseph King to May Morris, November 6, 1936 (postmark), Haslemere Educational Museum (Library and Archive), Haslemere, Surrey.

⁶⁴ Joseph King, *A Handbook to the Peasant Arts Section of the Haslemere Educational Museum* (Haslemere: The Haslemere Educational Museum, 1927).

⁶⁵ Manuscript of lecture "Iceland's History and National Traditions", to be given on 10th March 1937, Joseph King, LD.5.1025, Haslemere Educational Museum (Library and Archive), Haslemere, Surrey.

⁶⁶ E.W.Swanton, *A Country Museum: The Rise and Progress of Sir Jonathan Hutchinson's Educational Museum at Haslemere* (Haslemere: Haslemere Educational Museum, 1947).

⁶⁷ MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*.

with everything that was said by every other member. Greville MacDonald, indeed, hinted at a degree of distance in stating that his “inclinations embraced rather politics and non-conforming orthodoxies”⁶⁸ and his speech at the inaugural meeting of the “Peasant Arts Fellowship” incarnation of the movement, held in 1913, seemed decidedly lacking in commitment, praising the society’s “broad, catholic purpose” and not much else.⁶⁹ However, in the mid-1920s, when his political career was over and the Peasant Arts Movement perhaps became more central to his concerns and his life, King publically stated that the fact that “popular forms of art” were “democratic” could only lead to “anarchy”, “a sort of worship of novelty, extravagance, inanity or even ugliness” and seemed to suggest that the high authority of a king or church was a guarantee of good taste.⁷⁰ This seems a rather odd position for a Non-conformist political radical. Similarly, in the same lecture, King supports the group line that mechanisation is an evil in society and that the pre-industrial world was an idyll to aspire to.⁷¹ This seems a little hard to reconcile with his own enthusiasm for progress in the form of the motor car, a point emphasised in his obituary in the *Western Daily Press*.⁷² This would seem to be an example of King performing a certain role in a specific context. As part of the Peasant Arts Movement, he performed the role of the anti-industrial feudalism, whether or not such a position could be easily reconciled to the parts he played in other arenas.

King’s role in the movement gives further indications of his motives and personal traits, confirming some indications noted above. Again, affiliation, aligning himself to a group, was a key motive for action. This, together with the fact that he maintained a loyalty to the organisations suggests a high “agreeableness”. His commitment and hard work over so many decades speak to high “conscientiousness”. His “openness to experience” can perhaps

⁶⁸ Ibid., 375.

⁶⁹ Peasant Arts Fellowship, *First Public Meeting of the Peasant Arts Fellowship, Peasant Arts Fellowship Papers No 9* (London: The Vineyard Press, 1913).

⁷⁰ Draft of lecture “A Peasant’s Arts Museum: Its characteristics and values”, approx. date 1925, Joseph King, LD.5.977, Haslemere Educational Museum (Library and Archive), Haslemere, Surrey.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Former MP for North Somerset Dead,” *Western Daily Press*, August 27, 1943, 4.

be argued both ways. The Peasant Arts and Arts and Crafts movements in general were “essentially preservationist”⁷³ and backward rather than forward looking. Nonetheless, becoming involved with groups of influential persons (G.K.Chesterton, the famous novelist and Cecil Sharp, the renowned folk song collector, were speakers at the first Fellowship meeting⁷⁴) in an enterprise so representative of the zeitgeist and initiating a broad range of innovative projects does ultimately suggest someone very ready to try new things.

The Peasant Arts movement did not halt the tide of industrialization nor dissuade the rural working class from its modern pleasures. As MacDonald admitted, “it was not in worldly sense [sic] successful”.⁷⁵ According to decorative art expert Isabelle Anscombe, the whole Arts and Crafts Movement was seen as something of a joke by the 1920s.⁷⁶ Today, however, it is recognised as “one of the most influential, profound and far-reaching design movements of modern times”.⁷⁷ The Peasant Arts movement played its part in preserving and promoting these crafts and this culture. Joseph King was able to contribute to this through his connections (the connections with the Blounts primarily but also through those that he was able to call on to support the movement) and his wealth. However, his personality traits were also key here, in particular his high conscientiousness in preserving the legacy of the movement after so many others had died and other activities had been wound up.

Surrey County Council: The Forceful Firebrand

Joseph King was a member of Surrey County Council from 1898 to 1904, during which time he played a very active role in managing education in the county. From 1898, he was a

⁷³ Isabelle Anscombe, *Arts and Crafts Style* (London: Phaidon Press, 1991), 215.

⁷⁴ Peasant Arts Fellowship, *First Public Meeting of the Peasant Arts Fellowship*.

⁷⁵ MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, 382.

⁷⁶ Anscombe, *Arts and Crafts Style*.

⁷⁷ “The Arts and Crafts Museum”, Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed September 22, 2016, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-arts-and-crafts-movement/>

member of the Technical Education Committee which managed secondary schools, continuation schools and courses for agriculture and horticulture.⁷⁸ After the 1902 Education Act, when local authorities took over responsibilities from School Boards,⁷⁹ he became a member of the newly constituted education committee, and was appointed to the elementary and the finance sub-committees, taking the position of vice-chairman of the latter.⁸⁰ Soon afterwards, he was also on the staffing and building sub-committees⁸¹ and was a member of a small group dealing with school attendance.⁸² He retired from his seat in 1904⁸³ but stood again, unsuccessfully, in 1907.⁸⁴

King's motivation for involvement in local education politics is not clear from the extant sources. However, as discussed above, taking on such roles was encouraged by Mansfield House and was consistent with its view on the nature of appropriate public service. His work in Surrey reveals details of his cognitions in the specific sphere of education. In a volume he wrote in 1903 for the guidance of local school managers, he expresses enthusiasm for high quality provision for the youngest children in the school: they require "special attention", a bright classroom, a pleasant teacher and "the introduction of kindergarten methods".⁸⁵ This volume also demonstrated his interest in improving school facilities more generally: "To allow schools to remain with insufficient floor or air space for the children, with insanitary officesmeans that parents and children are being deprived of what the law prescribes and what they pay to get but do not receive".⁸⁶ This comment reveals other

⁷⁸ Surrey County Council Reports 1898, Surrey County Council, Surrey History Centre, Woking, Surrey.

⁷⁹ United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1902.

⁸⁰ Surrey Education Committee Minutes, March 3, 1903-April 24, 1912, Surrey County Council, CC767/40/1/1, Surrey History Centre, Woking, Surrey; Surrey County Council Reports 1903, Surrey County Council, Surrey History Centre, Woking, Surrey.

⁸¹ Surrey County Council Reports 1904, Surrey County Council, Surrey History Centre, Woking, Surrey

⁸² Elementary Sub-Committee Minute Book, March 24, 1903-June 30, 1905, CC767/40/3/1, Surrey County Council, Surrey History Centre, Woking, Surrey

⁸³ "Surrey County Council Elections: The Nominations," *The Surrey Mirror and County Post*, February 26, 1904, 5.

⁸⁴ "Onlooker", "Topic of the Day," *The Surrey Mirror and County Post*, August 21, 1908, 5.

⁸⁵ Joseph King, *The School Manager* (London: Edward Arnold, 1903), 26.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

key ideas: parents, as tax-payers, have a right to quality education for their children and although money spent appropriately on education is money spent well, value for money, or getting what you pay for, is important. This is reminiscent of his scrupulous financial management at Mansfield House. His keen interest in this topic is further evidenced by letters he wrote to local papers: one example was to the *Surrey Mirror* in 1906, in which he complained about the council's "lax control of expenditure".⁸⁷ A further value which emerges is King's concern for protecting Non-conformist interests in education. This was a period in which religious tensions were prominent in local education matters: The Act of 1902 made Local Education Authorities responsible for church schools, thus causing uproar amongst Non-conformists who resented having to pay for such religiously orientated institutions.⁸⁸ King was keen for his co-religionists to be properly represented on appropriate committees, as demonstrated by a letter to the *Surrey Mirror* in 1903⁸⁹ and campaigned for the opening of "non-dogmatic" schools, accessible to children of all faiths.⁹⁰ These are all themes which were important in his later educational work as a member of parliament.

King's time in Surrey County Council also reveals a great deal about the way he conducted himself and thus his personality traits. Intriguingly, whereas his work in the philanthropic organisations suggested high agreeableness and an ability to make and sustain friendship, King's behaviour in this more confrontational arena suggests a character that many did not find agreeable. The conscientiousness with which he pursued what he considered the right course of action and the assertiveness (suggesting high extraversion) with which he spoke up about faults and mistakes he perceived in others was the cause of some ruffled feathers among his fellow council members. The local newspapers reported a number of incidents which suggested that King was in the habit of irritating others: for

⁸⁷ Joseph King, "The Surrey County Council", *The Surrey Mirror*, December 28, 1906, 3.

⁸⁸ Hattersley, *David Lloyd George*.

⁸⁹ Joseph King, "Nonconformists and Education in Surrey," *Surrey Mirror*, July 31, 1903, 7.

⁹⁰ "Dorking British Schools: The Annual Meeting: Speeches by Lord Farber and Mr Joseph King," *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, March 28, 1903, 5.

example, an article published in 1908 recounts an incident of “some years ago” when King had “offended some of his colleagues by an imprudent speech”, resulting in one of them making a quip at his expense when there was a call of “God save the King”.⁹¹ In a letter to the *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser* in 1907, King himself claimed that he “was always protesting against the policy and proceedings of the committee” on grounds of its financial sloppiness and describes a scene where he threatened to resign, occasioning a heated response.⁹² This was one of a series of letters which he wrote to the local newspapers, raining criticism on the council with an eye to vindicating himself and securing his own re-election. This in itself caused anger amongst his erstwhile colleagues, with the chair of the education committee criticising his actions.⁹³ A few years later, the *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser* recalled the exchanges and claimed that King’s “outspoken criticisms” had gained him “notoriety”.⁹⁴

As was pointed out in the press, these letters did “not commend themselves to the electors”.⁹⁵ King was not successful in regaining a seat on the council and therefore his influence on local education policy was curtailed. His own bitter complaints about the council after his term of office suggest that he did not achieve much when he was there either. The only success he chose to boast about is the fact that he managed to save some money by persuading the council to award a printing contract to a local rather than a London firm “after long delays and constant discouragement”.⁹⁶ King’s personality traits proved in this case to be a limiting factor on his ability to bring about the educational changes which he desired.

⁹¹ Onlooker, “Topics of the Day,” *Surrey Mirror*, February 14, 1908, 5.

⁹² Joseph King, Letter, *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, January 26, 1907, 8.

⁹³ A.W.Chapman, Letter, *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, January 19, 1907, 7.

⁹⁴ “Surrey men at the Polls: Successes and Defeats,” *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, January 29, 1910, 4.

⁹⁵ “Onlooker”, “Topics of the Day,” *Surrey Mirror*, August 21, 1908, 5.

⁹⁶ Joseph King, Letter, *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, January 19, 1907, 7.

MP for North Somerset: The Merry Andrew of the Radical Party

Joseph King first stood as a Liberal candidate for parliament in the New Forest division of Hampshire in 1892 and tried again for the Isle of Thanet in 1904 and 1906.⁹⁷ He was eventually successful in winning a seat representing North Somerset in 1910 and remained in that post until 1918.⁹⁸ He was asked in 1917 by local party members not to seek re-election “in the party’s interest”.⁹⁹ There had been tensions in the constituency over King’s perceived pacifist stance on several issues, particularly his voting against the Military Services Act.¹⁰⁰ An unfortunate incident in which he was prosecuted and fined following an indiscreet letter to a journalist about “the supply and condition of war materials” could hardly have been helpful in this context.¹⁰¹ He subsequently joined the Labour party and was an unsuccessful candidate in Ilford in 1920 and in York in 1923.¹⁰² King’s motivation for wishing to pursue a political career is not clear from existing sources but would seem to be a natural counterpart to his enthusiastic attempt at involving himself in local politics. There was a long standing link between the Liberal party and Non-conformity and a newly emerging link between “New Liberalism” and social reform.¹⁰³ Indeed, many “new liberals” had been involved in settlement work.¹⁰⁴ Thus there is continuity between King’s previous interests and this new role.

The cognitions which King tried to further as an MP are clear from his contributions to parliamentary debates and his oral and written questions to ministers. In a prominent position was his desire to promote Non-conformist interests, particularly with regard to

⁹⁷ Michael Stenton and Stephen Lees, *Who’s Who of British Members of Parliament. Volume II 1886-1918. A Biographical Dictionary of the House of Commons* (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ “Mr King MP asked to retire,” *The Times*, March 7, 1917, 3.

¹⁰⁰ “Attitude of Mr. J. King MP to the Government: Resignations from the local Liberal Association,” *Manchester Guardian*, April 14, 1916, 10.

¹⁰¹ “An Indiscreet MP – Letter that mentioned munitions – Penalty £125,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, October 21, 1916, 4.

¹⁰² Stenton and Lees, *Who’s Who of British Members of Parliament*.

¹⁰³ Ian Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905-1915* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

obtaining the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales, where its congregations were a minority of the population.¹⁰⁵ He also raised issues that had connections with his Peasant Arts work: arguing, for example, that New Delhi should be built using the skills and traditions of local Indian craftsmen.¹⁰⁶ However, there is no evidence of a committed anti-industrial, pro-rural stance that was the orthodoxy emanating from other Peasant Arts members, which again suggests a certain ambivalence on his part about that aspect of his life. He supported the “new liberal” policies of social reform, as one would anticipate from his involvement with Mansfield House, taking a particular interest in the circumstances of illegitimate children, on which subject he presented several bills which he supported by vigorous campaigning inside and outside parliament.¹⁰⁷

Education was a very high priority for King in his role as a member of parliament and he took pride in what he saw as his expertise in this area, claiming to be always right about these matters: “I may sometimes make mistakes in this House, but never upon educational subjects”.¹⁰⁸ King believed that education provision in the country needed improving, declaring that in particular “our elementary system of education is in ruins”.¹⁰⁹ Always careful of the cost and proper financial management, he nonetheless was broadly in favour of increased investment.¹¹⁰ He described himself as one of the “undenominationalists who believe in popular education”,¹¹¹ meaning that he thought all schools should be available for everyone and all children should have the same experience whichever school they attended. He was determined to wipe out the social taint associated with attendance at an elementary

¹⁰⁵ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, April 13, 1910, vol 16 cc1245-6; United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, May 8, 1912, vol 38 cc399-400; United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, May 14, 1912, vol 38 cc981-1092

¹⁰⁶ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, October 24, 1912, vol 42 cc2394-5W; United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, December 10, 1912, vol 45 cc228-9

¹⁰⁷ Joseph King, *Filius Nullius (Nobody's Child)* (London, St. Catherine's Press, 1913).

¹⁰⁸ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, April 10, 1913, vol 51 c1505

¹⁰⁹ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, July 18, 1916, vol 84 c956

¹¹⁰ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, March 10, 1911, vol 22 cc1789-80

¹¹¹ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, March 7, 1912, vol 35 c587

school so as to make them more acceptable to families of all social classes.¹¹² He was a vociferous campaigner against the (supposedly voluntary) “school pence” charged by some schools which he contended was being used expressly to exclude poor children from rich areas.¹¹³ He was deeply unhappy about the 1902 Education Bill which obliged local authorities to support church schools, which were often in very poor condition.¹¹⁴ King also believed in education for older children and objected to them being pressurised to leave at twelve.¹¹⁵ He was most particularly concerned about the exclusion from school of children between three and five following critical government reports in 1905 and 1908 about the benefits of such provision.¹¹⁶ He was suspicious of the idea of separate “nursery schools” being used to replace elementary school provision for these children. This was because such schools would be set up mainly in the most deprived areas and therefore would be “offering a certain class of education to those who live in slums, and sayings to those who live in decent houses, ‘No, these schools are not for you.’”¹¹⁷ In the same vein, he objected to the idea of nursery schools being set up by voluntary religious groups which would impose their views and perhaps select children according to religious background.¹¹⁸ All in all, this seems to be a very well-developed and coherent nexus of beliefs, consistent with the aims he tried to promote in his role in local government.

King’s behaviour in parliament sheds light on his personality traits, particularly his “extraversion”, “agreeableness” and “conscientiousness”. He was extremely conscientious and hard-working. This was acknowledged early in his career by the North Somerset Liberal Party, whose report in 1911 praised King for his devotion and the “vigorous” carrying out of

¹¹² Joseph King, “The ‘Social Taint’ in Primary Schools,” *The Times*, May 16, 1913, 10.

¹¹³ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, July 27 1914, vol 65 cc908-9

¹¹⁴ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, April 10, 1913, vol 51 cc1501-8

¹¹⁵ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, June 6, 1912, vol 39 cc398-421

¹¹⁶ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, April 24, 1913, vol 52 cc525-9

¹¹⁷ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, March 18, 1918, vol 104 c774

¹¹⁸ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, March 18, 1918, vol 104 c775

his duties.¹¹⁹ He made himself very noticeable in the House with a large number of contributions: the humorous journal *Punch* claimed that he had the record for asking most questions.¹²⁰ He complained on occasion of his colleagues' lack of enthusiasm for parliamentary business, bemoaning, for example, the fact that the House had fallen into a habit of "adjourning early for no possible reason except apparently to have a longer sleep".¹²¹

This willingness to push himself forward also suggests high extraversion, as does his readiness to take on the role of the "The Merry Andrew of the Radical Party."¹²² He was described by one political commentator as "constantly asking funny questions in a Sunday School voice. His solemnity of visage in contrast with his quaint observations is the occasion of constant merriment".¹²³ According to the *Daily Mirror*, his likeness to the Mad Hatter was "a never-ending source of mirth to politicians" and his "drolleries at question time are always relished".¹²⁴ This latter claim was, unsurprisingly, not quite true: some people found him an irritant. Conservative MP Robert Cecil once suggested "it might be better if the honourable member turned his talents to something besides being the buffoon of the house".¹²⁵ One very hostile newspaper article following his fine for the letter to the journalist claimed that fellow MPs thought him a bore but had come "to regard Mr King's presence in their assembly with a sort of patient resignation".¹²⁶ Other aspects of his manner in the House were also likely to have caused occasional umbrage. He could be ridiculously pompous, for example in claiming "I am quite surprised, in reading my own speeches, how good they were".¹²⁷ His forthrightness could tip into personal offensiveness: for example, he was criticised for

¹¹⁹ "North Somerset Liberals: The Annual Meeting Address by Mr J. King," *Western Daily Press*, April 24, 1911, 3.

¹²⁰ "By the Way," *Portsmouth Evening News*, November 5, 1934, 6.

¹²¹ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, June 30, 1910, vol 18 c1203

¹²² "Parliament in Profile: 'The Buffoon of the House'," *Lincolnshire Echo*, January 25, 1913, 4.

¹²³ John Foster Fraser, "Peeps in Parliament," *Cheltenham Looker-On*, June 29, 1912, 5.

¹²⁴ "The Mad Hatter," *Daily Mirror*, December 3, 1915, 12.

¹²⁵ "Parliament in Profile: 'The Buffoon of the House'," January 25, 1913, 4.

¹²⁶ "Somerset MP Fined £100. Mr. Joseph King's Grave Offence. Breach of Defence of the Realm Act. How He Escaped Going to Jail," *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser*, October 25, 1916, 1.

¹²⁷ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, May 30, 1918, vol 106 c1028

discourteousness by Conservative MP Henry Page Croft after calling the opposition “cowardly”.¹²⁸ His “agreeableness” in his role as an MP would therefore seem to be limited, despite the appeal he had for some.

King found the amount of influence he was able to bring to bear on public policy as an individual MP limited and expressed his frustration about this. He claimed that it was very difficult to get any measure passed unless it was introduced by the government: private members bill, however good they were, were rarely successful.¹²⁹ He deprecated the amount of power held by the cabinet which he saw as in conflict with a true system of “Parliamentary rule”.¹³⁰ However, the repeated highlighting of an issue could persuade policy makers of the virtue of a case. The discussion of parliamentary bills gave opportunities for introducing amendments. MPs could also serve on or make representations to committees formulating policy. The 1918 Education Act provides examples of how King exercised these sort of powers. He felt (whilst acknowledging uncertainty) that it was his own efforts which had highlighted the impact of school pence and ensured the inclusion of a clause which categorically abolished all fees in elementary schools, except for meals and medical treatment.¹³¹ Similarly, the proposing and passing of an amendment to allow elementary schools to take children up to the age of sixteen was “partly, or largely” due, he said, to himself.¹³²

One clause where he most certainly did have a very significant impact was clause 19 which concerned nursery education.¹³³ The Board of Education planned to introduce legislation making it possible (but not compulsory) for local authorities to fund nursery education and preferred the option of the nursery school which was a separate institution

¹²⁸ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, June 30, 1910, vol 18 c1207

¹²⁹ “Big Gathering at Council Schools: Mr King and the Irish”, *Western Daily Press*, May 2, 1910, 5.

¹³⁰ Joseph King, “Cabinet Government,” *The Times*, October 22, 1913, 10.

¹³¹ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, March 18, 1918, vol 104 c776; United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918, clause 26.

¹³² United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, July 15, 1918, vol 108 c749

¹³³ United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918, clause 19.

from the elementary school.¹³⁴ When the bill was being discussed in the House of Commons, King entered forcefully into the debate, taking up a strong position in favour of nursery classes within existing schools for reasons which have been explained above.¹³⁵ It seems clear from some of the exchanges that members of the Board of Education found him rather irritating: Lewis, the Parliamentary Secretary made a rather curt reply to King's suggestion that there had been "ignorant and stupid" hostility to the participation of Scottish members in the debate and was somewhat sarcastic when trying to clear up King's confusion between day nurseries (childcare facilities) and nursery schools.¹³⁶ However, after an initial outright refusal, King's demand that "nursery classes" should be explicitly permitted by the Act was accepted.¹³⁷ The Board did not really want to encourage these classes but neither did it want to jeopardise the possibility of improvements to existing early years provision in schools by condemning the nursery class absolutely.¹³⁸ These policy makers did not support King's views but his insistence forced their hand somewhat. There was a good slice of luck here in King's getting his way on this issue. This intervention has had a profound influence on the development of a divided system of nursery education in England, where different children attended different types of institution. Sadly, this was precisely the kind of situation King had spent his political life trying to work against.

Joseph King, as a unique individual, was therefore able to have some impact on policy as a member of parliament. In a time before MPs were paid, his privileged class and personal wealth were key factors in enabling him to take on this role in society in the first place.¹³⁹

His personal traits, particularly his conscientiousness, enabled him to get some pet issues into

¹³⁴ Palmer, "Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes?"; Brehony, "Stat och Förskola i England och Wales, 1900 – 1918."

¹³⁵ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, July 1, 1918, vol 107 cc 1475-89

¹³⁶ United Kingdom, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, July 1, 1918, vol 107 cc 1475-89

¹³⁷ Palmer, "Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes?"

¹³⁸ Letter, Pelham to Phipps, April 13, 1918, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1), ED 24 760, National Archives, Kew; Letter, Dale to Phipps, May 10, 1918, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 760, National Archives, Kew.

¹³⁹ Michael Rush, *The Role of the Member of Parliament since 1868: From Gentlemen to Players* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

prominence and so facilitate changes in policy. His tendency to play the buffoon and the fact that not everyone liked him very much may have been limiting factors, not least in preventing him from gaining promotion. His clearest impact, the amendment of the nursery education clause in the 1918 Education Act, demonstrates that his being in the right place at the right time, finding himself in favourable circumstances which he did not create, also contributed to his success.

Conclusion

This article has presented a portrait of the work of Joseph King in several spheres of education. It was conceived as a unique picture of a unique individual but the range of his interlocking interests has meant that it has provided insight into a tranche of progressive ideas circulating in his lifetime. The workers in the university settlements and in the Arts and Crafts movements were deeply concerned with improving the lot of the poor, in part through exposing them to new ideas. Both movements are subject to criticism from scholars today for the fact that their beliefs rested on paternalistic notions of a privileged “squirearchy” who could model appropriate ways to live to the ignorant. Nonetheless, these philanthropic instincts encouraged particularly the university settlers to work in public service and political roles. There are clear links and continuities between those involved with social reform movements and the Liberal Party and its reforming agenda.

Winter’s definition of personality has proved a useful tool in the creation of the “Joseph King” that is presented here. His “social context” - his class, his wealth, his networks built at Uppingham and Oxford and his religion – were all important to who he was, how he saw himself and how others saw him. All of these things contributed to his “motivation” to behave in the ways he did. A largely coherent set of values and beliefs has emerged. These include a conviction that education is of fundamental importance to society;

a desire for careful and prudent investment that has a genuine impact on the quality of the service and a determination that all schools paid for by the public should be equally accessible to the whole of the public. It has also been possible to identify personality traits that King displayed in the different contexts in which he worked. Most striking of all is his high “conscientiousness”, displayed through his boundless enthusiasm for hard work and long-standing commitment to these causes over many decades. However, post-modern ideas about personality have raised interesting questions about the limitations of the historian’s ability to understand a figure from the past. There are fractures as well as a measure of coherence in this picture. The extent of King’s belief in some of the wilder policies of the Peasant Arts Movement remains ambiguous. There is also contradictory evidence about his “agreeableness”: a man who seemed to operate extremely successfully among a sympathetic circle of friends seemed to be unable to manage the cut and thrust of adversarial politics without making himself both ridiculous and irritating, at least to some. The idea of “performing” character, putting on different personalities in different circumstances, seems pertinent here. King had a distinctive persona in the political arena which perhaps was quite different to how he acted in private.

This article is aligned with the biographical turn in studies of the history of education and explores the relationship between one individual and the society in which he lived. It set out to examine the extent to which one man, unencumbered by social disadvantage, was able to influence educational policy and practice and bring about the changes which he desired. King’s case demonstrates that individual personality could indeed be a key element in success and failure in these arenas. His class, his gender, his wealth and his connections gave him the time and opportunity to involve himself in organisations and take on roles in which he could pursue his goals. However, his “conscientiousness”, his hard work and persistence, was crucial in ensuring the smooth running of the philanthropic organisations and

safeguarding the legacy of the Peasant Art movement. In his role as an MP, this trait helped him keep issues he cared about in the purview of policy makers and this could occasionally lead to policy shifts. On the other hand, his questionable “agreeableness” teamed with high extraversion and his resultant forceful manner were counterproductive in his efforts to persuade others to his views in his work in Surrey County Council. Similarly, his facetious persona in the House of Commons made him a figure of fun and limited his chances to become a policy maker himself. Society provided opportunities but it was Joseph King the individual who used or squandered these.

This article has made no claims for King as a great educational pioneer and yet there are aspects of his story from which we might take inspiration. We may be uneasy about some aspects of the settlements and the Peasant Arts Movement today and yet admire the soundness of the fundamental principles that lay behind the desire to help. King’s vision of the English school system is out of step with today’s fractured reality, with ever increasing numbers both of faith schools and partially unregulated “free schools”¹⁴⁰, and yet it still stands as a coherent alternative that would appeal to many campaigning groups. Most significantly of all, however, is the affirmation this story provides of that one relatively unexceptional individual could begin to shape his world.

Joseph King’s experience cannot of course be divorced from his own location in time and place and yet his story is a useful starting point for reflection on how we might begin to understand these issues in other societies. Do all people, regardless of class, race and gender, have an equal opportunity to have their voice heard and put their ideas into practice? To what extent can and should the wealthy philanthropist influence policy? What kind of public persona should an individual adopt in order to amplify his or her voice? Is it

¹⁴⁰ “Press release: David Cameron announces 31 new free schools on final visit as Prime Minister”, last modified July 12 2016, Gov.uk, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/david-cameron-announces-31-new-free-schools-on-final-visit-as-prime-minister>; “House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 06972, 14 October 2015: Faith Schools: FAQs”, Robert Lang and Paul Bolton, accessed September 22, 2016, www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn06972.pdf

sometimes necessary to adopt an awkward and irascible front in order to make an impression or can this damage our causes? The techniques for examining this in contemporary contexts, with potentially more and richer sources of data available, may be different but the questions remain pertinent today.